

Brown Says Soviet Long Sought Way to Knock Out U.S. Missiles

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WASHINGTON, May 30— Secretary of Defense Harold Brown said today that the Soviet Union has long been striving to achieve a capability for making a surprise attack against American land-based missiles.

In a speech to the graduating class of the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis, Mr. Brown said the Pentagon believed that the Soviet Union embarked as early as 1962-63 on "a policy of building forces for pre-emptive attack against U.S. intercontinental ballistic missiles."

He said that so far the United States had been able to counter these efforts. But, he said, by the early 1980's, two new missiles, the SS-18 and the SS-19, would give the Soviet Union the means of destroying "with high assurance" most of the 1,000 American land-based Minuteman missiles.

Mr. Brown's views indicate a change in the official American view of Soviet nuclear intentions over recent years. Although Mr. Brown and his predecessors in the Nixon and Ford Administrations discussed the problem of a possible Soviet first strike, officials said they could not remember such a definitive statement of what the United States regards as the Soviet objective.

Defense officials have long said that any attempt by either side to acquire a so-called counterforce capability, against the other's land-based missiles, would upset the strategic balance of forces. But now the United States appears to believe that this is the Soviet plan, and Mr. Brown and others are said to be laying the groundwork for achieving a similar, surprise-attack capability in the form of a new mobile missile, known as the MX.

Critics of the MX, which would carry 10 warheads and would be built to survive a Soviet surprise attack, question whether

the Soviet Union is actually seeking a first-strike capability.

"You cannot draw that kind of explicit conclusion from the nature of their weapons programs or their technical characteristics," said Herbert Scoville Jr., a former assistant director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Secretary Brown, in describing Soviet strategic policies, said that "in the past decade, the Soviets have added over 1,000 strategic missiles to their inventory and increased their number of deliverable warheads threefold."

He said the first real Soviet threat emerged in the late 1960's with the deployment of the SS-9 and SS-11 missiles.

"The smaller SS-11's were targeted against American urban centers," he said. "The more than 200 SS-9's were almost surely targeted against the 100 Minuteman launch-control complexes, two missiles to a complex for reliability."

Although the United States responded by deploying "airborne launch-control capabilities," Mr. Brown said, "the Soviets continue with a policy of building forces that could be used in a pre-emptive, counterforce mode."

In particular, he said, the new SS-18 missile, with 10 warheads, had the accuracy to destroy most of the American Minuteman missiles in their underground silos.

Mr. Brown suggested that this problem, in part, could be solved by the new strategic arms limitation treaty, which would put a lid on the total number of warheads that Moscow could deploy. "But even with SALT II, we must in parallel start to modernize our strategic forces with the specific goals of increasing our survivable strategic payload," he added, an allusion to plans to deploy the mobile MX missile.